

## Environmental Champs

### Sustainability Awards recognize area individuals, organizations, businesses

By Kate Ramsayer / *The Bulletin*

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One organized a thriving community garden and spearheaded recycling efforts at St. Charles Bend.

Another incorporates energy-saving elements in designs for homes and businesses. Others offer nontoxic and Earth-friendly building materials, help low-income families save money on utility bills, or encourage employees to think sustainably.

The five winners of the first Sustainability Awards represent people and businesses who bring sustainability into daily life, said Mike Riley, executive director of the Bend-based Environmental Center, which gave out the awards at a ceremony Thursday .

"We really wanted to tell the stories of people in the community who are kind of making sustainability happen, in various different environments," Riley said.

"Sustainability, in the end, is about all the different choices we make every day."

The Environmental Center, which offers educational programs and supports other conservation-minded nonprofits, sought nominations and hosted the awards as a way of telling some positive stories, he said, and letting people in Central Oregon see what individuals and businesses are doing locally. Community members nominated 28 individuals and companies, he said, and the review committee expanded the original three categories to five.

"We were really pleased to see how many nominations we got," Riley said. "It speaks to how many people are doing good things, and see themselves as part of this concept of making sustainability real." The winners were Mark Petersen, Brilliant Environmental Building Products, Steele Associates Architects, Bend Area Habitat for



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From left, Mark Petersen, Don Horton, Jorden Swart, Scott Steele and Mark Quinlan stand with their Sustainability Awards at the Oxford Hotel in Bend on Thursday. The Environmental Center hosted the ceremony to honor people and businesses who "bring sustainability into daily life," said Mike Riley, executive director of the center.



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Humanity and the Bend Park & Recreation District.

### **Mark Petersen, individual**

Petersen, director of hospitality at St. Charles Bend, brings a sustainability ethic to his home and work life.

"I'm a pretty avid outdoors person," Petersen said. "As a father, I would like to have our environment be preserved for my kids."

ABOVE: From left, Mark Petersen, Don Horton, Jorden Swart, Scott Steele and Mark Quinlan stand with their Sustainability Awards at the Oxford Hotel in Bend on Thursday. The Environmental Center hosted the ceremony to honor people and businesses who "bring sustainability into daily life," said Mike Riley, executive director of the center.

He lives in Bend's Higher Ground community, which is designed with an environmental focus. For 14 years, homeowners had individual garden plots — but Petersen noticed that they didn't grow much food. So in early 2009, Petersen drummed up interest and organized a 12,000-square-foot community garden, developing a system where residents bought shares and chipped in with gardening work.

"Things just thrived," he said of the garden in northeast Bend. "So much so we donated a lot of produce to the Bend Community Kitchen."

In honoring Petersen, the review committee also noted that he is a vegetarian, shops locally, bikes to work when the weather allows and more.

At his work, he has expanded St. Charles' recycling program from a 1 percent recovery rate eight years ago to 34 percent currently. He started programs to buy local and organic food for the hospital, and replaced paper cups with reusable cups — keeping 150,000 cups out of the landfill each year. Petersen said he was pleasantly surprised to hear about the award — and was pleased by the number of fellow nominees also striving to be green.

"It was very reassuring, or encouraging, to hear that so many people are doing work around sustainability," he said.

### **Brilliant Environmental Building Products, small business**

Jorden Swart founded Brilliant Environmental Building Products in Bend almost three years ago and decided to carry only sustainable, nontoxic products and show people they had a variety of Earth-friendly options.

"We saw there could be a meshing of quality along with doing something great for your community and your world," Swart said.

The store sells environmentally conscious substitutes for all kinds of building materials, he said, and a common requirement is that all materials have to be nontoxic and safe for people to live around. Beyond that, products meet other sustainability criteria — whether they are made of recycled items, are from materials that are harvested sustainably, or created from resources that can be quickly regrown, like bamboo or cork .

Swart works to ensure people get the building materials that work for their project. "In order to be the most sustainable you can, you have to meet the needs that each individual has," Swart said.

The company got the nod from the Sustainability Awards in part because it exclusively carries sustainable products, doesn't sell products made with polyvinyl chloride, works to conserve energy and prevent waste in its showroom, and helps teach others about sustainability, the Environmental Center said.

### **Steele Associates Architects, large business**

While Steele Associates designs buildings that meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards, it also tries to bring sustainable aspects to every home and business the architects plan, said Scott Steele, president.

"A lot of people hear sustainable or green and they think solar panels," Steele said. "That's one of hundreds of sustainable practices."

A goal of the Bend architecture firm is to be a regional leader in sustainable design, he said. Whenever employees start a project, they look at the location and orientation of the building — which, properly designed, can save 10 percent on utility bills. They consider water-saving landscaping options, air quality within the building, how the building will fit in with its surroundings and more.

Steele said he has always been interested in architecture and energy efficiency, and believes Central Oregon's environment is its greatest asset .

"People are here because of the beauty, streams, mountains, desert — we should do everything we can to protect it," he said.

Steele Associates stood out because of its work in the region, according to the Environmental Center. It designed 75 percent of Central Oregon's LEED-certified buildings, including its headquarters in NorthWest Crossing , and sponsored the area's first LEED training workshop. It also buys all its electricity through Pacific Power's Blue Sky renewable energy program and is a key participant in Commute Options.

### **Bend Area Habitat for Humanity, nonprofit**

Several years ago, the Bend Area Habitat for Humanity committed to build homes that were as green and energy efficient as possible, said Mark Quinlan, executive director of the organization. Its last 17 homes have met the gold standards of Earth Advantage, a third-party certifier.

"It's not because we want to pat ourselves on the back, but it really helps our low-income families we're serving," Quinlan said.

Homes are outfitted with solar panels that sometimes can put power back into the grid in summer, but also are designed with lots of insulation, low-flow plumbing devices, xeriscaping and a design to take advantage of the sunlight to heat homes in winter and keep them cool in summer.

"I think it's a misperception that being sustainable is expensive," Quinlan said. "It's just really looking at it differently."

And more new homes are going to move in that direction, he predicted.

The Habitat for Humanity chapter also was recognized for its ReStore, where people can donate items that include appliances, furniture and building materials. Profits from reselling the items support the building program.

In 2009, ReStore diverted more than 2 million pounds of material from the landfill, according to The Environmental Center.

Additionally, building homes for families also gives them stability and allows family members to participate more in the community, Quinlan said.

## **Bend Park & Recreation District, government**

Sustainability today requires a culture shift within organizations, said Don Horton, executive director of the Bend Park & Recreation District.

"We're trying to get sustainability at the level where all of our staff think about it when they're making their daily decisions," Horton said.

For years, the district has been composting material and working to preserve wildlife habitat in its parks along the Deschutes River, he said. It has reduced the amount of pesticides it uses, and switched to all organic products in the riverside parks. Its new headquarters was built to meet strict environmental standards, and the adjoining park has storm-water systems that naturally filter the water before it enters the river.

Currently, district staff are working on a sustainability plan to determine what steps the district should take in coming years.

"Just the business that we're in, of providing parks and open spaces to the community, I think it's an important part of what we do," Horton said.

The park district built the first LEED-certified publicly owned building in the region, The Environmental Center said in giving the district the award. Some employees have had sustainability training, and the district has worked to improve water and energy conservation at its parks and at the Juniper Swim & Fitness Center.

"It's truly a model for other large organizations to follow," the announcement from The Environmental Center stated.

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